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ABSTRACT

An orientation, testing, and counseling program to improve the dropout rate of at-risk postsecondary vocational students in Arkansas was developed and field tested at Cossatot Vocational Technical School, DeQueen, Arkansas. Project activities included: (1) improving prevocational exploration and assessment through the development of a well-equipped Counseling Resource Center; (2) developing an enhanced and streamlined orientation/assessment/placement system; (3) improving affective domain skills and knowledge through the creation of a Current Issues and Attitudes program; (4) improving student support services; and (5) providing effective and efficient job placement services through the cooperative use of the Counseling Resource Center. A marketing campaign was conducted to make the public aware of the value of vocational training, and free vocational evaluation was made available throughout the year. A comparison of enrollment figures, dropout or withdrawal rates, and completion rates of regular and at-risk students for the 3 years covered by the program (1987-88, 1988-89, and 1989-90) was made using the 1986-87 year as the base. The comparison showed that the dropout rate for all students declined from about 48 percent to 19-27 percent during the program, and the dropout rate for at-risk students dropped from 63 percent to about 16-26 percent. (KC)

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FINAL REPORT

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A MODEL PROGRAM FOR THE RETENTION OF HIGH-RISK, POSTSECONDARY VOCATIONAL STUDENTS

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FINAL REPORT

A MODEL PROGRAM FOR THE RETENTION OF HIGH RISK, POSTSECONDARY VOCATIONAL STUDENTS

INTRODUCTION

The overall objective of this program was to develop and field test an orientation, testing and counseling program with the expectation that appropriate testing and counseling would improve the overall dropout rate, and particularly benefit those students who are "at-risk" of dropping out of school. Students who showed a lower than average academic score on pre-enrollment testing and/or have a need for financial aid in order to attend postsecondary training were included as "at-risk" students.

OBJECTIVES

Specific objectives identified for this project included:

(1) Improved pre-vocational exploration and assessment through the development of a well-equipped Counseling Resource Center;

(2) An enhanced and streamlined Orientation/Assessment/Placement system to ensure that students are fully-informed and properly placed into appropriate programs and academic/skill levels;

(3) Improved Affective Domain skills and knowledge through the creation of a Current Issues & Attitudes (CIA) Program;

(4) Increased employee sensitivity and satisfaction of job duties through inservice ES^2 workshops;

(5) Improved student support services and programs through the joint efforts of Special Needs Counselor, JTPA, Single Parents, and Internship staff;

(6) Provide effective and efficient Job Placement/Job Search Training program through the cooperative use of Counseling Resource Center;

(7) Provide immediate feedback as to the effectiveness of these actions in reducing our student dropout statistics, through student surveys;

(8) Produce a better prepared, better educated and more marketable job hunter/student, in less time and for less money than previously possible, through the concerted efforts and actions cited above.

The desired result of all of the above mentioned objectives was to lower the student dropout rate significantly, particularly those students who fall into the "at-risk" categories.

PROCEDURES

Vocational Exploration & Career/Life Planning

An aggressive Pro-Vo marketing campaign was begun to make the public aware of the value of vocational training. Free, computer-assisted career/life planning and vocational exploration

services were available throughout the year. The DISCOVER software package was made available for use free of charge to those individuals desiring to plan their vocation. The Counseling Resource Center, housed in the Library/Resource Center, was made available for after-hours use two nights per week, with assistance available for use of the videos, software, or other resource materials.

It soon became evident that the DISCOVER program was not as appropriate for adult learners as it was previously believed, and its use was discontinued. This program is more appropriate for high school use than for postsecondary students. Also, due to a lack of participation, the Counseling Resource Center was no longer opened for night-time usage but was restricted to use during regular school hours or on a "reserved" basis for group usage.

Improved Assessment & Orientation

To more accurately assess the academic levels, interests, and job aptitudes of entering students, the ACT Asset System for Orientation and Placement was introduced and utilized in combination with the U.S. Employment Service (USES) Interest Inventory System. These tests were administered to each student prior to enrollment, scored and interpreted by the Counselor, and the results relayed to the student no later than the following day.

Based on these results, students were advised as to their potential for success in their chosen field, and possible alternative routes or additional class studies were suggested.

Students identified as needing remedial work were referred to a basic skills tutorial program prior to enrollment in a regular class. It was felt that this was preferable to allowing a student to enter a program while his/her basic reading/math skills were so low as to impair comprehension of the course work. This was done in an effort to prevent frustration and possible drop-outs.

Affective Skills Development

Employability skills were stressed to all students in their Communications classes, and extra attention was given to those students designated as "at risk". These classes contained elements desired in a good employee such as punctuality, work ethics, attitudes, etc. In addition, programs were scheduled throughout the school year dealing with substance abuse, child abuse, and personal development. Referrals to qualified counselors were made to those individuals who expressed a desire for more help.

EVALUATION

To arrive at the value of this program, a comparison was made of enrollment figures, drop-out or withdrawal rates, and completion

rates of regular and at-risk students for the three years covered by the program, 1987-88, 1988-89, and 1989-90. The 1986-87 academic year was used as the base for comparison.

The base year of 1986-87 shows a completion rate of 51.5% overall, with a general dropout rate of 48.4%. When the figures are adjusted to only include at risk students (academically, financially, or otherwise handicapped), they reflect a dropout rate of 63%.

During the first year of this program, the overall dropout rate was reduced to 24.5% and the at-risk dropout rate to 26%. In 1988-89 the overall dropout rate declined to 18.75% while the rate of withdrawals for those designated as at-risk dropped to 16.8%. During the final year of the program, 1989-90, the overall dropout rate increased slightly to 27.2% and the dropout rate for at-risk students also increased to 26.1%. Statistical data for this three-year period may be found in the Appendix.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is evident that additional attention to students' abilities and interests prior to enrollment, combined with appropriate career counseling, can dramatically affect the retention rate of all students, and can be particularly effective when dealing with students who are handicapped in some way. As the majority of

students enrolled in vocational programs appear to be academically, financially, or otherwise handicapped, it would be prudent to invest as much time as possible in evaluating and assisting these students prior to enrollment. In this way, success is a more likely prospect for the student and will lead to a more confident, employable individual.

It is recommended that any school experiencing a high dropout rate, or with a large enrollment of "at risk" students, consider a similar program in an effort to combat the "failure" cycle experienced by so many students.

APPENDIX

COSSATOT VOCATIONAL TECHNICAL SCHOOL
1987-88 FULL-TIME ENROLLMENT

PROGRAM	TOTAL ENROLLMENT	NUMBER AT RISK	% AT RISK	TOTAL WITHDRAWALS	AT RISK WITHDRAWALS	TOTAL WITHDRAWALS, %	AT RISK WITHDRAWALS, %
ACCOUNTING	22	14	63.64%	4	3	18.18%	21.43%
DATA PROC.	25	20	80.00%	11	10	44.00%	50.00%
SECRETARIAL	23	19	82.61%	4	2	17.39%	10.53%
COLLISION REPAIR	13	11	84.62%	2	2	15.38%	18.18%
AUTOMOTIVE SER.	13	12	92.31%	1	2	15.38%	16.67%
ELECTRONICS	19	16	84.21%	9	7	47.37%	43.75%
LPN	13	9	69.23%	1	1	7.69%	11.11%
TRUCK DRIVING	28	14	50.00%	5	2	17.86%	14.29%
IRT	9	8	88.88%	4	3	44.44%	37.50%
TOTALS	165	123	74.55%	42	32	25.45%	26.02%

PROGRAM	COURSE COMPLETERS	TOTAL AT RISK COMPLETERS	% COMPLETERS	% AT RISK COMPLETERS	TOTAL CARRIED FORWARD	TOTAL AT RISK CARRIED FWD.	% CARRIED FORWARD	% AT RISK CARRIED FORWARD
ACCOUNTING	10	4	45.45%	28.57%	8	7	36.36%	50.00%
DATA PROC.	10	8	40.00%	40.00%	4	2	16.00%	10.00%
SECRETARIAL	9	7	39.13%	36.84%	10	10	43.48%	52.63%
COLLISION REPAI	7	6	53.85%	54.55%	4	3	30.77%	27.27%
AUTOMOTIVE SER.	9	8	69.23%	66.67%	2	2	15.38%	16.67%
ELECTRONICS	6	6	31.58%	37.50%	4	3	21.05%	18.75%
LPN	12	8	92.31%	88.89%	0	0	0.00%	0.00%
TRUCK DRIVING	23	12	82.14%	85.71%	0	0	0.00%	0.00%
IRT	5	5	57.5%	62.50%	0	0	0.00%	0.00%
TOTALS	91	64	55.15%	52.03%	32	27	19.39%	21.95%

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COSSATOT VOCATIONAL TECHNICAL SCHOOL
1988-89 FULL-TIME ENROLLMENT

PROGRAM	TOTAL ENROLLMENT	NUMBER AT RISK	% AT RISK	TOTAL WITHDRAWALS	AT RISK WITHDRAWALS	TOTAL WITHDRAWALS, %	AT RISK WITHDRAWALS, %
ACCOUNTING	27	24	88.89%	4	4	14.81%	16.67%
DATA PROC.	27	24	88.89%	4	3	14.81%	12.50%
SECRETARIAL	34	30	88.24%	6	3	17.65%	10.00%
COLLISION REPAIR	15	15	100.00%	5	5	33.33%	33.33%
AUTOMOTIVE SER.	19	17	89.47%	3	2	15.79%	11.76%
ELECTRONICS	15	12	80.00%	6	4	40.00%	33.33%
LPN	14	12	85.71%	0	0	0.00%	0.00%
TRUCK DRIVING	25	21	84.00%	5	5	20.00%	23.81%
TOTALS	176	155	88.07%	33	26	18.75%	16.77%

PROGRAM	COURSE COMPLETERS	TOTAL AT RISK COMPLETERS	% COMPLETERS	% AT RISK COMPLETERS	TOTAL CARRIED FORWARD	TOTAL AT RISK CARRIED FWD.	% CARRIED FORWARD	% AT RISK CARRIED FORWARD
ACCOUNTING	15	13	55.56%	54.17%	8	7	29.63%	29.17%
DATA PROC.	17	16	62.96%	66.67%	6	5	22.22%	20.83%
SECRETARIAL	23	22	67.65%	73.33%	5	5	14.71%	16.67%
COLLISION REPAIR	8	8	53.33%	53.33%	2	2	13.33%	13.33%
AUTOMOTIVE SER.	11	11	57.89%	64.71%	5	4	26.32%	23.53%
ELECTRONICS	7	6	46.67%	50.00%	2	2	13.33%	16.67%
LPN	14	12	100.00%	100.00%	0	0	0.00%	0.00%
TRUCK DRIVING	20	16	80.00%	76.19%	0	0	0.00%	0.00%
TOTALS	115	104	65.34%	67.10%	28	25	15.91%	16.13%

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COSSATOT VOCATIONAL TECHNICAL SCHOOL
1989-90 FULL-TIME ENROLLMENT

PROGRAM	TOTAL ENROLLMENT	NUMBER AT RISK	% AT RISK	TOTAL WITHDRAWALS	AT RISK WITHDRAWALS	TOTAL WITHDRAWALS, %	AT RISK WITHDRAWALS, %
ACCOUNTING	24	18	75.00%	10	7	41.67%	38.89%
DATA PROC.	29	24	82.76%	7	6	24.14%	25.00%
SECRETARIAL	28	20	71.43%	6	3	21.43%	15.00%
COLLISION REPAIR	11	10	90.91%	1	1	9.09%	10.00%
AUTOMOTIVE SER.	17	13	76.47%	10	9	58.82%	69.23%
ELECTRONICS	12	7	58.33%	8	4	66.67%	57.14%
LPN	15	6	40.00%	2	1	13.33%	16.67%
TRUCK DRIVING	26	21	80.77%	0	0	0.00%	0.00%
TOTALS	162	119	73.46%	44	31	27.16%	26.05%

PROGRAM	COURSE COMPLETERS	TOTAL AT RISK COMPLETERS	% COMPLETERS	% AT RISK COMPLETERS	TOTAL CARRIED FORWARD	TOTAL AT RISK CARRIED FWD.	% CARRIED FORWARD	% AT RISK CARRIED FORWARD
ACCOUNTING	12	9	50.00%	50.00%	2	2	8.33%	11.11%
DATA PROC.	16	13	55.17%	54.17%	6	5	20.69%	20.83%
SECRETARIAL	18	15	64.29%	75.00%	4	2	14.29%	10.00%
COLLISION REPAIR	6	5	54.55%	50.00%	4	4	36.36%	40.00%
AUTOMOTIVE SER.	3	1	17.65%	7.69%	4	3	23.53%	23.08%
ELECTRONICS	4	3	33.33%	42.86%	0	0	0.00%	0.00%
LPN	13	5	86.67%	83.33%	0	0	0.00%	0.00%
TRUCK DRIVING	26	21	100.00%	100.00%	0	0	0.00%	0.00%
TOTALS	98	72	60.49%	60.50%	20	16	12.35%	13.15%

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